

Pseudo-left Québec Solidaire remains silent on workers' revolt in France

Louis Girard**14 June 2023**

While French President Emmanuel Macron has now succeeded in imposing his pension-cut law through violent state repression and the treachery of the trade unions, the mass working-class opposition to capitalist austerity that has convulsed France for months continues. Another day of mass mobilization took place on June 6.

Despite the historical and cultural ties that bind the majority French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec to France—ties often celebrated by Quebec's capitalist elite—the political establishment and mainstream media have had very little to say about the French events.

This is particularly true of Québec Solidaire (QS), whose “left-wing” pretensions conceal a profound hostility to class struggle. Having read between the lines of the few reports and commentaries of any substance published by the capitalist press, QS has judged it best to remain silent on the explosive and globally significant events taking place across the Atlantic.

This narrow-minded provincialism stems from the nationalist perspective that animates Québec Solidaire. The third party in the Quebec National Assembly, QS strives for an independent capitalist *République du Québec* and is in the political orbit of the Parti Québécois, the big business party that has long championed the creation of a third imperialist state in North America that would be part of NATO, NORAD and NAFTA.

However, objective reality is not determined by what the petty bourgeoisie thinks. For four months, the French working class has resisted the assault on pensions by the right-wing president and ex-banker Emmanuel Macron. Eighty percent of the population is opposed to this “reform,” which is meant to finance a massive increase in the military budget. Demonstrations and strikes involving millions of workers have shaken the country.

The Macron government responded with police-state measures. It deployed savage repression against demonstrators while using Article 49.3 of the

Constitution, an anti-democratic mechanism that allows the government to ignore and gag parliament to impose its diktats. This has discredited not only Macron, denounced by large sections of the population as the “president of the rich,” but the French political system as a whole.

Vital questions of political perspective are at stake. As the Socialist Equality Party in France has pointed out, the political situation in the country is objectively revolutionary. Passage of the pension reform

confronts the masses of workers with a harsh reality: they are not waging a union struggle aimed at convincing Macron, but a political struggle against the capitalist state. Macron runs a police state in the service of an entrenched capitalist oligarchy that rules against the people. To divert hundreds of billions of euros to the ultra-rich and his 'European war economy,' Macron responds to struggles not by changing his policies, but with bloody police violence and mass arrests.

The way forward ... is to prepare for a general strike to topple Macron and abolish the powers of the presidency. This proposal has the support of two-thirds of the French people, who want a strike that would block the economy and defeat Macron. But its realization will require mobilizing the full industrial and political power of the working class. We can't leave this struggle in the hands of the union apparatuses: it requires the building of new grassroots organizations in a political struggle that raises the question of power.

This revolutionary program provokes the organic hostility of pseudo-left groups representing wealthy middle-class strata, such as Québec Solidaire and its

“sister” parties in Europe—SYRIZA in Greece, Die Linke in Germany, Podemos in Spain—that have imposed capitalist austerity and supported NATO when in power.

The revolt of the French working class is part of an explosion of class struggle across the European continent, with powerful waves of strikes in Portugal, Germany and Britain. This comes against the backdrop of NATO’s war in Ukraine against Russia, and the diversion of massive financial resources by capitalist governments to wage a conflict that could turn into a world war. Indeed, Macron’s pension cuts are designed to finance a massive rearmament of France, to the tune of an additional 90 billion euros for the military budget.

In a stark demonstration of its pro-imperialist character, Québec Solidaire has never uttered a word in opposition to the massive rearmament program Justin Trudeau’s federal Liberal government has implemented since 2017, and which includes the acquisition of a new fleet of warships and 88 F-35 jets. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, QS has tabled two motions, both passed unanimously by the Quebec National Assembly, which repeat the lie of “unprovoked” Russian aggression against Ukraine and hide the provocative role played by the US-led NATO alliance of which Canada is an active member, in preparing, instigating and prosecuting the war.

The mass revolt in France and on the European continent is also in response to the worst inflation in 40 years, ever greater social inequality and the capitalist ruling class’s turn towards authoritarian forms of government. Quebec’s ruling elite knows it is also facing mounting working class anger at the intolerable social conditions caused by the crisis of the capitalist system. In neighboring Ontario, a movement for a province-wide general strike rapidly developed last November when 55,000 education support workers defied a savage anti-strike law adopted by Doug Ford’s hard-right Progressive Conservative government.

That is why Quebec’s political class is largely silent about the events in France. They fear like the plague that the militant actions of the French workers will inspire their class brothers and sisters in Quebec, Canada and the US, strengthening the historic bonds of working-class solidarity and brotherhood on both sides of the Atlantic.

The few comments that have appeared in the bourgeois press express this concern. For example, the Montreal daily *Le Devoir*, which is close to Quebec nationalist circles, acknowledged that opposition to the pension reform is an “outlet for the deep malaise in French society” and deplored the French president’s “denial of

democracy,” warning that this only serves to “prepare the next explosion.”

Mathieu Bock-Côté, a columnist for the *Journal de Montréal* (JdM), a right-wing tabloid that extols the “French Catholic roots” of the Quebec population to fan the embers of anti-immigrant chauvinism, has only written two articles in the JdM on the events in France, although he was there in March and writes regularly for the French press. His two articles were entirely devoted to denouncing the “insurrection” against Macron. Despite his vitriol against the trade unions, Bock-Côté is keenly aware of their role in stifling working class resistance, writing that “certainly, France is in revolt,” but it is “a revolt controlled by the unions.”

The latter are doing their utmost to torpedo the mass movement against the pension cuts. They are seeking to divert it into futile appeals directed at the National Assembly, which has already endorsed Macron’s continued rule, and are now trying to call a halt to further mass actions. While workers in France need to draw the lessons of these developments and grasp the role played by pseudo-left forces (such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his Unsubmissive France and the New Anticapitalist Party) that seek to chain them to the pro-capitalist unions, workers in Quebec need to draw the same conclusions about Québec Solidaire and the pseudo-Marxist groups (such as *Gauche Socialiste* and Fightback) that are part of it and claim that it can serve as an instrument in fighting for socialism.

Québec Solidaire’s indifferent and hostile attitude to the revolt of the French working class shows once again that workers in Quebec will not find in it an ally in their struggles. Instead, Québec Solidaire is a political enemy, which will seek to dupe them with “left” phrases while subordinating them to the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy and promoting illusions the capitalist politicians can be pressured into “listening to reason.”



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